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ABSTRACT

The New York State Archives and Records Administration (SARA) provides centralized records management services to State agencies. The State Government Records Management Information Series includes booklets and brochures on many aspects of sound records and information management. This booklet explains the purposes and benefits of records management and describes the key elements of a successful agency records management program. Information is provided in the following areas: (1) the scope and purpose of a records management program; (2) the differences and similarities between the precomputer concept of records management and electronic information resources management (IRM); (3) common records management problems; (4) the benefits of a records management program; (5) key elements of an agency records management program, e.g., program authority and organization, records management training and support for staff development, and activities of the agency records office. The address and telephone number of the State Archives and Records Administration are also provided. (MAB)

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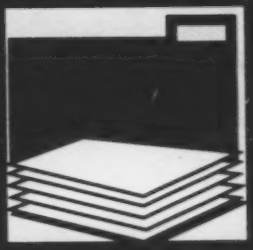

Establishing an Agency Records Management Program

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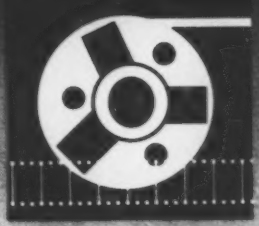

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STATE GOVERNMENT
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Establishing an Agency Records Management Program

The State Archives and Records Administration (SARA) provides centralized records management services to State agencies. The State Government Records Management Information Series includes booklets and brochures on many aspects of sound records and information management.

This booklet explains the purposes and benefits of records management and describes the key elements of a successful agency records management program. Today, many New York State agencies are developing effective programs. By sharing the key ingredients of successful programs, SARA hopes that all agencies will devote the attention, resources, and expertise needed to improve their records management programs.

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Scope and Purpose of a Records Management Program

Records management provides tools for effective and efficient information control.

A records management program means the planning, organizing, directing, controlling and other activities needed for effective records creation, maintenance, use, and disposition. An agency conducts these activities in order to adequately document its functions and programs, and to contribute to economical and efficient agency operations. As defined in State law, "records" means all papers, microforms, computer tapes and disks, maps, photographs, film and sound recordings, or other documentary materials (except library books and museum artifacts), regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by any agency. Records are a means for recording, storing, and transmitting information, and records management provides tools for effective and efficient information control.

The ultimate purpose of records management is to insure that information is available when and where it is needed, at the least possible cost. Although cost

containment is an important records management objective, the protection and availability of needed information is the first priority of a records management program.

"Records Management" and "Information Resources Management"

State government is shifting rapidly to electronic record keeping.

The concept of records management originated nearly 50 years ago. In the precomputer era, records management was primarily a response to the exponential growth of paper records resulting from expanded government programs and services. State government continues to generate huge and increasing quantities of paper records. At the same time, government is shifting rapidly to electronic record keeping. The substantial resources associated with electronic data processing equipment and expertise have spawned a new concept called Information Resources Management or IRM.

Records Management and IRM are very similar, if not synonymous, concepts. IRM, in theory, focuses on the value and uses of information and aims to manage information effectively and efficiently regardless of medium. An important IRM concept, often overlooked in practice, is that *information* is the resource and *technology* is only a tool. In fact, IRM programs to date have emphasized almost exclusively the management of computer, telecommunications, and other high-technology equipment and expertise. This emphasis results from government's attempt to con-

trol the demanding planning process and enormous expenditures required to implement information systems that use new information technologies.

Each State agency must assure effective collaboration among the centralized offices or programs which share responsibility for agency information management.

To be most effective, Records Management and IRM must be closely coordinated to form a unified approach to agency information policy and management. In most State agencies, authority for records and information-related activities is fragmented. Within each agency, the centralized offices or programs which often share responsibility for information management are records management, administrative analysis, research and policy analysis, freedom of information and privacy review, library services, internal controls, information systems design, office automation, electronic data processing, space allocation, budgeting, and procurement. The challenge to each State agency is to develop a comprehensive organizational approach to records and information management which assures effective collaboration among these various offices.

Does Your Agency Have a Records Management Problem?

The first step in developing a records management program is recognizing the ongoing problems that result from uncontrolled records. Too often the need for records management is not identified until there is an immediate crisis, such as when important documents can't be found, or when files overflow or crowd out space needed for staff. Once resolved, records management problems are then forgotten until they reappear as a new crisis. In New York State government, years, even decades, of insidious

neglect have added up to major problems. For example, two-thirds of all State agency records are now maintained with no plans for systematic disposition, either by destruction or archival preservation. If these records were scheduled for disposition, as required by law, an estimated half million file drawers of paper as well as many records in other media could be destroyed, transferred to less costly Records Center storage space, or transferred to the State Archives.

Storage space alone for unneeded records costs State government millions of dollars annually.

Storage space alone for unneeded records costs State government millions of dollars annually. Other problems are readily apparent, although the costs are not as easily segregated. For example:

- **Many of the State's most valuable vital and archival records are not identified and protected.** Vital records are crucial for continuity of government in case of a crisis. Archival records have enduring legal, administrative, or research value.

- **Many expensive microfilming applications do not conform to basic industry standards** which ensure the effectiveness of microfilming as a records management tool.

- **Computerized records are proliferating**, both in mainframe and office automation systems, but little attention is paid to standards and procedures to ensure their protection and appropriate disposition.

- **Manual files are not organized to promote easy access to needed information** or periodic weeding of obsolete materials.

Overflowing files, difficulty in locating records, high storage costs, and loss of valuable records and infor-

mation all are symptoms of records management problems.

Benefits of Records Management

Records and the information they contain need to be managed well to insure efficiency, economy, and overall good government.

Records are a crucial component of the governing process. They contain information which supports functions affecting every person in government or within its jurisdiction. Like other important State government resources, records and the information they contain need to be managed well to insure efficiency, economy, and overall good government. In brief, the goals and benefits of an agency records management program are to:

- **Guarantee that information is available when and where it is needed** to insure effective administration of public programs.
- **Control the creation and duplication of records** and maintain them at minimum cost.
- **Identify and insure the secure storage of vital records** which are essential to resume government operations in the event of a disaster.
- **Apply the appropriate use of micrographics, automated data processing, and other information management techniques.**
- **Insure periodic legal disposal of records** that have no further administrative, legal, fiscal, or research values.
- **Identify and insure the preservation of archival records.**

Key Elements of an Agency Records Management Program

A State agency's investment in records management must be carefully planned, supported by top management, and directed by trained staff.

Solving the State's records management problems is neither frivolous nor impossible. A modest, ongoing investment in records management will pay dividends, as nearly every major corporation, the Federal government, and many other states know — because they have records management programs. A State agency's investment in records management must be carefully planned, supported by top management, and directed by trained staff. In most agencies, this should include full-time professional records analysts.

The key elements listed below, if followed, are the solution. This list is not a comprehensive description of all the potential functions in an agency records management program. Rather, these elements are the essential prerequisites to establish and gradually develop a comprehensive, modern records management program.

Program Authority and Organization: Support from the Top

1. **A directive from the head of the agency authorizes a records management program** and informs managers of its importance to agency operations, including immediate cost savings and potential long-term pay-offs in improved programs and public services.

2. **Records management program responsibility is clearly assigned to a specific official or office,** which has direct access to the Executive office and can command the cooperation of all staff.

3. **The agency records management office has authority to direct records management throughout the agency,** including authority to establish, audit, and enforce records management policies and procedures.

4. **The records management officer develops a records management plan** which identifies problems and provides an action plan for needed improvements in retention and disposition scheduling, storage of records, use of micrographics and other information technologies, identification and protection of vital and archival records, program staffing, and policies and procedures.

5. **The records management office has enough staff with appropriate professional and technical expertise** to develop a records management program in the agency, provide technical advice and assistance, analyze and schedule records, and to follow up on technical issues and problems.

6. **The records management officer defines and interprets the policies, goals, priorities, and procedures** of the program and disseminates this information throughout the agency.

7. **The agency records management program is closely coordinated with related information management functions,** such as freedom of information and privacy review, administrative analysis, internal program audit, information systems design, forms, correspondence and reports management, and data processing.

8. **Each agency program unit or office has a designated liaison** who devotes part time to carrying

out records systems design, maintenance, and disposition activities in close cooperation with the records management office.

Records Management Training: Support for Staff Development

The agency Records Management Officer is responsible for records management planning.

9. **The agency records management staff attend training sessions** provided by SARA and other sources such as the Public Service Training Program and the Forum For Information Resources Management.

10. **The records management officer ensures that program liaisons receive sufficient technical training** and that all agency staff are aware of how records management tools improve program operations, of the definition of "records", and of the legal requirements governing disposal of records.

Records Inventory and Disposition Scheduling: The Agency-Wide Perspective

11. **The records management officer ensures that all program units complete an inventory of their records,** establishes a system to maintain the inventory, and keeps it up to date.

12. **The agency records management office develops a plan to schedule all agency records.**

13. **The records management officer works with program units to prepare schedules** which contain the following:
    - A clearly written description of each records series.

- A minimum retention period that meets legal administrative, fiscal, research, and other needs.
- Ways to remove obsolete and inactive records from filing systems.
- Directions for appropriate transfer of inactive records to the State Records Center.
- A justification for the proposed retention period and final disposition.

Records Maintenance and Disposition: Activities in Agency Offices

14. File custodians use retention and disposition schedules issued by SARA to:

- Remove inactive or obsolete records from filing systems.
- Retire inactive records and backup computer tapes to approved agency storage areas or the State Records Center facility.
- Protect archival records identified by SARA while these records are in the agency, and transfer them to the State Archives as scheduled.
- Destroy records at the end of their legal minimum retention period in accordance with the State wastepaper recycling contract administered by SARA.

15. The agency records management office helps program units improve filing systems and files management practices, identify and protect vital

records, and use information technology appropriately.

16. **The agency records management office reviews, approves and monitors purchase and use of filing equipment and micrographics equipment or services.**

For More Information

The State Archives and Records Administration provides assistance, direct services, and free publications to help agencies improve their records management programs. If you would like further information, contact:

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